



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT RESOURCE PROTECTION STUDY CASA GRANDE RUINS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Background

Casa Grande Ruins National Monument (Monument) is located in the City of Coolidge, Arizona and was established on August 3, 1918 by President Woodrow Wilson to protect the Casa Grande ("Big House") and other archeological sites within its boundaries. When the Monument was originally established, the extent of the Hohokam culture was not fully understood. If archeologists had known in 1918 what they know today, the original boundaries of the Monument would have likely been much larger. In recent years, rapid commercial and residential development in the City of Coolidge has created new challenges for protecting the area's rich archeological resources. In an effort to preserve these cultural resources, Casa Grande Ruins National Monument proposes to protect and acquire additional lands known to have significant archeological resources that are thematically related to the Casa Grande.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and §106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, National Park Service staff prepared a combined Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect to examine various alternatives and environmental impacts associated with the proposal to protect additional archeological resources. Impact topics identified during scoping and analyzed in the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect include archeological resources, historic structures, ethnographic resources, prime and unique farmland, visual resources, visitor use and experience, and park operations. The Preferred Alternative, identified in the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect, is Alternative 4 which includes the acquisition of a total of 189.43 acres and the transference of 3.75 acres. The 30-day public review of the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect began in November 2003.

Alternatives Considered

Four alternatives were evaluated in the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect including:

- **Alternative 1 - No Action (Federal Land Transfers):** This alternative consists of acquiring 4.5 acres of Bureau of Land Management land located at the southwest corner of the Monument; acquiring 7.41 acres of Bureau of Indian Affairs land located to the northeast of the Monument; and transferring 3.75 acres of National Park Service land on the southern edge of the Monument to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- **Alternative 2 – Federal Land Transfers and Contiguous Property:** This alternative includes the three federal land transfers considered under the No Action Alternative in addition to acquiring 80 acres of private land located to the west of the Monument.
- **Alternative 3 – Federal Land Transfers, Contiguous Property, and Grewe Site:** This alternative includes the actions under Alternative 2 in addition to acquiring the approximately 43.52 acre Grewe Site which is currently managed by the Archeological Conservancy.
- **Alternative 4 – Federal Land Transfers, Contiguous Property, Grewe Site, and Portions of Adamsville:** This alternative includes the actions considered under Alternative 3 in addition to acquiring the approximate 126 acre Adamsville Site which is currently managed as State Trust Land.

Each of these alternatives contains common actions including land acquisition procedures (meetings, contracts), fencing, signing, maintaining the properties, restoring the lands by promoting native vegetation, and supporting local or grassroots efforts to establish a National Heritage Area.

Identification of the Preferred Alternative

Alternative 4 *Federal Land Transfers, Contiguous Property, Grewe Site, and Portions of Adamsville* is the National Park Service's Preferred Alternative because it best meets the purpose and need for the project as well as the project objectives to 1) promote the protection and preservation of cultural resources currently located outside the Monument's boundary; 2) encourage increased understanding, knowledge, and interpretation of the Hohokam culture; 3) foster community appreciation and support for the preservation of significant cultural resources, 4) provide information and encouragement to Congressional representatives to gain their support for approval of a boundary expansion; 5) promote interpretive opportunities for the Monument; and 6) support local or grassroots efforts to establish a National Heritage Area that would further protect cultural resources.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Alternative 4 *Federal Land Transfers, Contiguous Property, Grewe Site, and Portions of Adamsville* is the environmentally preferred alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the six criteria suggested in §101 the National Environmental Policy Act. According to these criteria, the environmentally preferred alternative should:

- fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
- preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
- enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 only minimally meet the above six evaluation factors. These alternatives require the least amount of ground disturbance from fencing, signage, and noxious/exotic weed control and the least amount of time, energy, and funding for managing and purchasing the land; however, they also preserve the least amount of archeological resources of any of the alternatives.

Therefore, Alternative 4 *Federal Land Transfers, Contiguous Property, Grewe Site, and Portions of Adamsville* is the environmentally preferred alternative for this project. It best addresses the six evaluation criteria and preserves the greatest acreage of land which would protect the greatest number of cultural resources (particularly archeological sites) of any of the alternatives considered. In comparison to the other alternatives, Alternative 4 would require the greatest amount of ground disturbance from fencing, signage, and noxious/exotic weed control and the greatest expenditure of time and money for managing and purchasing the properties. It would also provide the greatest benefit, however, because it would enable the National Park Service to preserve sensitive Monument viewsheds and protect the more significant cultural resources on these lands for the benefit of future generations.

Why the Preferred Alternative Will Not Have a Significant Effect on the Human Environment

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

Under the Preferred Alternative, the Monument would acquire lands containing significant cultural resources, including approximately nine archeological sites (one site with historic structures) and nine ethnographic resources. Bringing these properties under the management of the National Park Service will protect them from future development, which will have a beneficial effect on these resources. Constructing fences around these properties would also have a beneficial effect because it would further protect the cultural resources from looting and vandalism. Construction-related activities such as fence building and weed control would be conducted outside of these cultural resources to minimize any adverse effects.

The Preferred Alternative includes acquisition of 80 acres of private land to the west of the Monument. The Natural Resources Conservation Service considers the land prime and unique farmland. Once the land is acquired by the National Park Service, agricultural production would be discontinued, and the area would be inactively restored to its natural state. Because only farmland in production can be considered prime and unique, the Preferred Alternative would have a minor to moderate adverse effect on the farmland status. To minimize this effect, the National Park Service would keep the agriculture-related infrastructure (irrigation canals) on the property so that the land could be returned to agriculture in the future, if desired.

The Preferred Alternative would have a moderate beneficial effect to visual resources because it would preserve the view shed around the Monument from development. The project would result in moderate beneficial effects to visitor use and experience from enhanced interpretive opportunities, better cultural resource understanding, and viewshed protection. Park operations would be adversely affected to a moderate degree since seven new employees and additional monies would be needed to manage the acquired lands.

Degree of effect on public health or safety

The Preferred Alternative includes acquiring lands and performing minor construction-related activities such as fencing and weed control. These activities are common and do not pose substantial health or safety hazards.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas

The Preferred Alternative would result in adverse effects on prime and unique farmland, as discussed in this FONSI under "Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse". No other unique resources have been identified in the project area that would be impacted by the Preferred Alternative.

Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

Throughout the environmental process, the proposal to protect additional archeological resources has not been controversial, nor are the effects expected to generate additional controversy in the future. During initial scoping for the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect, no comments were received. One comment was received during the 30-day public review of the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect which supported the project.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

The effects of acquiring additional lands and conducting minor construction activities, such as fencing and weed control, on these lands are fairly straightforward actions that do not pose uncertainties. The environmental process has not identified any effects that may involve highly unique or unknown risks.

Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The Preferred Alternative is not expected to set a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts

Cumulative effects were analyzed in the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect, and no significant cumulative impacts were identified.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The Preferred Alternative will have beneficial effects to nine archeological sites that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (AZ U:14:109, AZ AA:2:15, AZ U:14:108, AZ AA U:14:114, AZ AA:2:1, AZ AA:2:26, AZ AA:2:27, AZ AA:2:2 (Grewe Site), and AZ U:15:1 (Adamsville Site) (ASM)). In addition to their archeological significance, these sites are also ethnographically significant, and the Adamsville site contains important historic structures. By acquiring the lands on which these sites are situated, the Preferred Alternative would result in a determination of *no historic properties affected* for these nine historic properties. The National Park Service met its obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act through the use of the 1995 Servicewide Programmatic Agreement (stipulation IV. B. 5. for the "acquisition of lands for park purposes, including additions to existing parks"). The Arizona State Historic Preservation Office verified this approach and the determination of effect via electronic-mail on July 28, 2003.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat

A letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dated May 29, 2003 indicated that there are no records of threatened or endangered species, or those that are proposed to be listed as such under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 located on the proposed parcels for acquisition.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local environmental protection law

The action will not violate any Federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Impairment

The National Park Service has determined that implementation of the proposal will not constitute an impairment to the resources and values at Casa Grande Ruins National Monument. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect, the public comments received, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in NPS *Management Policies* (December 27, 2000). Although the plan/project has some negative impacts, in all cases these adverse impacts are the result of actions taken to preserve and restore park resources and values. Overall, implementation of the plan would benefit park resources and values, provide opportunities for their enjoyment, and would not result in their impairment.

Public Involvement

Public scoping for the Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect was initiated in June 2003 through the issuance of a press release to stakeholders, affiliated Native American tribes, interested parties, and newspapers. The press release informed various agencies and the public about the proposal to protect additional archeological resources by acquiring additional lands, and to solicited comments, issues, and concerns with regards to the project. The public was given 30 days to comment on the project ending on July 21, 2003. No comments were received during this time.

The Environmental Assessment/ Assessment of Effect was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending December 30, 2003. To notify the public of this review period, a press release was mailed to stakeholders, affiliated Native American tribes, interested parties, and newspapers. Copies of the document were sent to certain agencies and interested parties; made available in local repositories; and posted on the internet. One comment was received during this review period. This comment was from the Gila River Indian Community who stated their support for the proposal; verified that many of the archeological sites in the project area are ethnographically important to a number of tribes; and requested to be kept informed of the project's status.

Conclusion

The Preferred Alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Preferred Alternative would not have a significant effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur would be negligible, minor, or moderate in intensity. There would be no significant impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action would not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, the National Park Service has determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended:

(Original signed by Carol Burkhart

13 January 2004)

Carol Burkhart
Acting Superintendent, Casa Grande Ruins National Monument

Date

Approved:

(Original signed by Stephen P. Martin

23 January 2004)

Stephen P. Martin
Director, Intermountain Region, National Park Service

Date